

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS

Hearing Date: March 18, 2021 8:00 AM

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COMMENTS FOR: HB 1724

Robert Scott

Self - Retired

Colleyville, TX

I object to this bill as a limitation to voting rights and application of more open elections. This practice is in place in a number of states and there have been no documented cases of unwelcome outcomes (including fraud). I encourage extension and openness in voting registration and voting practices. When more Texans vote, democracy wins.

John Sefcik

self

Fairview, TX

Clarifying the duties of a poll watcher will provide better enforcement of lawful polling place procedures.

I urge you to support and vote for the bill or its provisions as bills may be amended and consolidated in other Committees.

DONNA EYLES

Self

CORPUS CHRISTI, TX

Each election volunteer should be given the proper tools to do his job. Being close enough to actually see/hear what is occurring and to provide a way to correct inappropriate actions should be allowed to happen as they occur.

Please vote YES for HB 1724.

Larry Ringler

Self-retired

Portland, TX

I fully support this bill to ensure that poll watchers are placed where they can actually see and hear the vote counting process. Please vote for this bill.

Eric Mann

Self

Dallas, TX

support

Barbara Harless

self

Murphy, TX

Please pass HB 1724.

As a longtime election judge (since the 1990s), and a poll watcher at central counting station (2016, 2020) I emphasize the positive points of HB 1724...

Observing all permissible activities requires a poll watcher to utilize both sight and audio of conversations regarding the preparation and processing of the votes. If a perceived violation or simple mistake occurs, the watcher must discern who may have verbally participated in the violation or mistake in order to report it correctly to the presiding judge with accurate information to make an appropriate correction.

(Sec. 33.053. A watcher ...may be present at the polling place at any time it is open)

(Sec. 33.054. A watcher ...may be present at any time the [ballot] board is processing or counting ballots)

(Sec. 33.055. A watcher ...may be present at any time the station is open for the purpose of processing or preparing to process election results and until the election officers complete their duties at the station).

A poll watcher must be able to address the presiding judge with any procedural mistake or irreversible mistake for the important purpose to prevent its repetition. Equally important is the presiding judge's clarifying instruction to a clerk who may have violated the Code, to ensure the clerk does not repeat the infraction.

Although poll watchers may be seen by some as an inconvenience or annoyance to the voting process, I can testify first hand that many election judges and clerks are unaware of changes in statute every 2 years, regardless of training or classes attended. In the instance of the Central Counting Station, the continuous flow of people in and out of the room and activates in the room over the course of 4 + days (period from end of Early Voting to Election Day night), I have witnessed several unintended infractions over the years. Having poll watcher eyes and ears focused on observing the election processes serves to enforce the Election Code as you have written. This is good for you and the millions of Texans who cast a ballot.

Dianna Berg

Personal

LaGrange, TX

Oppse

scott mesmer

self

corpus christi, TX

Poll watchers must have the authority to do their jobs and have access to the process as it occurs. Please vote for HB 1724

Julie Garcia

self

Corpus Christi, TX

We can only be vigilant if we have accessibility. Close the loop holes and let there be fairness. This is the only way to voter integrity being restored. Please vote for HB 1724.

Cynthia Gaskill

Self

Magnolia, TX

I support HB 1724. It's my opinion election watchers are very important and this bill will ensure they will be able to see and hear election procedures without someone or something impeding their duties. In other states in the November 2020 election, doubt was raised because some of their election watchers were blocked from being able to see and/or hear the counting of ballots. Election integrity is extremely important to our Republic and election watchers must be able to adequately see and hear what is going on. Election watchers must also be able to receive support if they see questionable activity. Thank you for your time and consideration.

John Takacs

Self

Dripping Spring, TX

Election Watchers should be properly trained on the potential issues that could occur during elections. Further they should be allowed to do their jobs properly. If they are to observe ballot counting they must be allowed to do so from a distance that makes the job possible. No vote tabulation should be allowed without election watchers in attendance. If irregularities are found by the election watcher they must be allowed to stop the process and call in additional help or higher authority to verify and either correct the issue or stop the count.

brad hodes

self

austin, TX

FOR HB1724.

Gene Robinson, Mr.

True Texas Elections!

Dallas, TX

Pass HB 1724 & HB 1622, and we want an end to election fraud at the local level. These crooked democrats have been stealing elections through fraud and e-voting machines for 20+ years in Dallas County. The cesspool we live in now is a direct result of vote and election fraud. End it now!!!

Dennis Botkin, Quality Engineer

Self

Richardson, TX

I strongly support the following House Bill

Entitles election watchers to sit or stand near enough to see and hear election officers' tabulation activities. Also, prevents election officers from ignoring watcher's concerns when a potentially irreversible tabulation mistake is being made.

Ken & Janis Friedrich

Self retired

Doss, TX

We strongly support this bill.

Celinda Singley

Self Insurance Agent

New Braunfels, TX

I strongly urge you to support HB1724 - this bill will help ensure transparency and honest vote counting in Texas counties. Election watchers are vital!!!

Jesse Suarez

Rabalais I&E Constructors

Corpus Christi, TX

Poll watchers need to be allowed to do their jobs and that includes seeing and hearing the process to ensure each vote is legitimately counted. Having a poll watcher observe activity from far away defeats the whole purpose of the watchers role. Sadly this clarification is needed to prevent a repeat of poll watching obstruction that occurred in other states. Please vote yes on HB1724

Arthur Simon

self, artist

Austin, TX

I oppose this bill because it opens the door to frivolous accusations and legal actions from unqualified election watchers.

Carla Birk

Self

Leander, TX

I served as a poll watcher at Central Counting in Travis County in 2020. I have served previously as the county alternate presiding judge, precinct judge, poll watcher, and EVBB. I support adding the clarification to "CLEARLY see and hear" election officials. I strongly encourage you to add "to read election documents and computer displays" and ensure they can be seen "in real-time" and not days or hours later as occurred at our location. Being at a distance to see what the official is wearing is not sufficient to the duties. Poll watchers must read the documents and computer screens. Also we were kept in a separate room with a speaker provided to "hear" although the microphone was merely a smart phone placed on a table in a large room filled with workers and counting machines so although we could hear sounds (when the speaker was working), it was difficult to clearly understand conversations. A dozen election officials can be in the counting room working on several different activities, so this type of microphone with speaker was completely insufficient. Please make sure physical barriers are not allowed nor distances greater than three feet (arms length) so the watcher can clearly see and hear the activities and documents. Poll watchers were kept in a separate room (10-30 feet away) from where scanners and ballot marking devices for remakes were being done. That is not possible to actually see the work being done. Travis County workers also purposely turned off computer monitors while

tabulating votes to specifically prevent watchers from seeing, and the audit log provided hours later showed multiple errors about invalid device use. That behavior cannot be allowed.

Poll watchers were not allowed to observe the memory sticks through the transfer from judge to county officials to computer to locked storage. Poll watchers must be allowed to have eyes on the memory sticks (or ballots) until they are secured. The pouches were opened in a separate room and watchers were not allowed in that room. The memory sticks were not secured in sealed, locked storage in view of the watchers. Locking and unlocking paper ballot bills was secure and documented, but the memory sticks were far less secure.

I am happy to discuss my experiences for follow up if desired.

Sarah Shah

Self

Houston, TX

I strongly support HB 1724. This bill entitles election watchers to sit or stand near enough to see and hear election officers' tabulation activities. it also, prevents election officers from ignoring watcher's concerns when a potentially irreversible tabulation mistake is being made. As an election worker/judge I understand how important it is to for poll watchers to be "up close and personal" with the election process. Poll watchers must be able to read the words and see and hear each action by election workers to determine whether the process is performed correctly and legally in real time. They must also be able to pause the process at anytime to stop mistakes or illegal activity before it effects the process or outcome.

Pamela Oglesby

None

Cedar Park, TX

Transparency is important and election watchers are there to insure that the laws are adhered to and the civil rights of the voters are protected, but they should not interfere in the process or make unfounded accusations.

Mary Wilson

Self

Austin, TX

You are trying to make sure election watchers can interfere in the process. Election watchers should NEVER be allowed to stop the process.

Kathy Williams

self, retired

Austin, TX

Oppose This bill would create chaos in polling areas. As a former election official, I know this would allow too many people inside polls, which often are small and it would limit election judges' options in setting up polls. We already allow poll watchers to be in a convenient place to observe and to make challenges. During the 2018 election, in a high turnout poll, we did not have room even for all the trained, official election workers and sufficient lines of voters to complete separate functions: registering and certifying voters, giving oaths to voter helpers, processing provisional ballots, etc. Election workers are trained and take an oath to obey the law and are then certified. Poll watchers take only an oath that they are the person appointed by their party or candidate. The provision that a poll watcher can stop the "process," poorly defined in this bill, would create a nightmare for busy precincts. This also would discourage voters with long lines and discourage and stress election workers making them more likely

to make mistakes. In 2018, on General Election Day, as a technical clerk, I worked 14 straight hours without stopping to eat or with any break. We had a continuous line of voters that snaked through the grocery store. Wait times were extensive despite every effort at efficiency. With no training required or tested knowledge of voting laws, poll watchers should have no challenge rights to hold up voting while they register a complaint. Many times at the 2018 poll, we had situations where both the judge and the alternate judge were busy with a curbside voter and a provisional ballot and could not have quickly moved to rule on a poll watcher's challenge. I saw no problem with voters' voicing their issues, like I'm a John Smith Sr. it was John Smith Jr. and having clerks search and satisfy the voter in his or her issues. Some were not happy to be told they registered a day late or that they were in the wrong county. A poll watcher certainly could stand close enough to see and hear and still maintain a distance convenient for election workers and voters. That should be determined by the judge. HB 6, if passed also, would not allow a judge to have a disruptive poll watcher removed and in fact a judge who tried could face. This is a partisan assault on elections workers and voters.

Roy Smith, Pastor

Self

Florence, TX

Please pass this bill that Allows watchers to observe vote counting

Paulette Armstrong

retired/self

Plano, TX

I am recommending that the changes made by this bill be approved by the Texas House Election Committee and sent to the state legislature for a vote. This bill clarifies what a poll watcher can do and what must occur when a mistake is made either intentionally or unintentionally. It is important that we have transparent elections so that voters have confidence in our election system.

Lana Moody

Self

Dallas, TX

I support this bill.

Zenobia C. Joseph

Self

Austin, TX

I oppose expanding "Sec. 33.058. Restrictions on Watcher's Activities" to include alternate judge and election clerk based on my service as a presiding judge, alternate judge, and election clerk in Travis County since, at least 2011. The presiding judge is, routinely, paid \$12/hour compared to election clerk (\$10/hour). Hence the presiding judge should bear more responsibility in addressing poll watcher concerns or the state should train and pay all election workers the same rate of pay. Ideally, an election clerk may attend in-person training but on-the-job training is permitted, too. This training variance may cause unnecessary disruption of the election process and may unintentionally result in intimidation. Poll watchers should continue to observe potential "irregularity or violation of law" as permitted in current law.

Jennifer Lane

Self

Denton, TX

The testimony being given in favor of this bill is nauseating. There is no recognition being shown of the deadlines elections officials are under. If these people wish to work the elections why don't they apply to do so instead of setting themselves up as adversaries to election workers, many of whom are in their own Party.

Bianca Gracia, Mrs

Latinos for America First, Latinos for Trump, Lideres de la Comunidad, and Americanos Conservative United

Pasadena, TX

Our organization of over 10k members and 2k Hispanic Evangelicals support this bill.

Kathy Turner

self, retired

McGregor, TX

Support this bill. Would suggest felony penalties for violations, and making this bill applicable to recounts.

Jennifer Lane

Self

Denton, TX

I am writing to oppose this bill. Poll watchers must not be allowed to obstruct the work of elections workers, delay what are already very tight deadlines, or intimidate prospective election workers with threats of felony charges.

Cathy Jaster

retired

Georgetown, TX

A poll watcher's job is to observe the process and see that the election process proceeds in accordance with the laws and codes. A poll watcher must be allowed access to see and hear the election activities and discuss election irregularities and illegal actions observed with the appropriate election official.
